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ABSTRACT

The project Self-Assessment and Self-Evaluation in New Forms of Training near the Workplace--A Step Towards the Learning Organisation was undertaken in Bavaria, Germany, to help companies begin the process of becoming learning organizations by helping workers manage their own learning. The project is based on the following principles and assumptions: (1) the increased autonomy and freedom of decision of today's employees should extend to managing their own learning; (2) the role and methodology of evaluation face considerable changes in the context of the increasing importance of lifelong learning and the integration of working and learning processes; (3) learners are the best judge of their learning progress and how it affects their work; and (4) self-evaluation does not work without certain changes in individuals and in their work environment (increasing trust and open communication between workers and employers, providing workers with the skills to assess their own learning behavior and progress, and revising companies' traditional appraisal systems). The companies cooperating in the project will first take stock of existing instruments for evaluation and self-evaluation. They will then develop standards for new or improved instruments. In accordance with the project's overall objective, involving employees in all new developments from the start will be a main consideration. (Contains 14 references.) (MN)

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Self-Assessment and Self-Evaluation in New Forms of Training Near the Workplace

This paper is about the ideas behind the model project "Self-assessment and self-evaluation in new forms of training near the workplace – A step towards the learning organisation" commissioned by the Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung and run by bfz Bildungsforschung, scientific guidance: isob Institut für Sozialwissenschaftliche Beratung in Bavaria.

10 The concept of Lifelong Learning has become extremely popular in the last few years, although it is not universally accepted or approved. There remain question marks with regard to the objective as well as to the desirability of constant learning for everybody.

However, it is not open to any doubt that there is a reality, sometimes a rather grim reality for the workers on the shop-floor underlying this concept. When new or improved machinery is introduced in their company they cannot afford **not** to learn to operate it, because it may be a question of keeping or losing their job. And technological and ensuing organisational changes have been accelerating for some time.

20 **The increased autonomy and freedom of decision of today's employees should extend to managing their own learning**

With regard to these dynamic processes companies have to face the fact that education and training become essential components of business development and that the constant need for updating knowledge and skills of the workforce makes learning at or near the workplace a necessity. Training has to be linked more and more closely to work, has to be integrated into working hours and operations.

Research on learning at the workplace as well as its implementation in companies have during the last years focused largely on the technical aspects: on workplace design, on an organisational environment favourable to learning and on the tools and media supporting it.

30 However, environment and tools are not everything. Learning is an activity performed by the learning individual, not the function of a technical arrangement. How about the ability of employees to assess their training needs and manage a learning process? How about their motivation and stamina? Are they able to adapt certain learning programmes to their own needs? These are the questions to be addressed in the near future.

Modern forms of work organisation involve an important amount of autonomy on the part of employees that is not matched by a corresponding autonomy with regard to their own learning. Organised learning processes remain largely the sole

40 responsibility of HRD managers with regard to content as well as administration and organisation.

More in line with their changed role would appear the extension of employees' responsibility

- To diagnosing their own training demands
- To assess the benefit of a certain learning activity for their performance at work
- And consequently, to suggest improvements of training/learning processes.

These are the main aspects of self-evaluation in learning at the workplace.

Role and methodology of evaluation face considerable changes

50 A second consideration is the increasing importance of evaluation. Lifelong learning, if it is to become a reality in everyday business, is a cost factor that has to be taken into account. Even if enterprises seek to shift part of this cost to the employee, who after all, maintains the value of his marketable qualification by it, a certain share will have to be borne by the employer as an investment in his human capital. And that raises the question of cost effectiveness. Evaluation, therefore, is no longer something nice to have but rather a crucial element of the learning organisation.

The methodology of evaluation, however, faces considerable changes, when it deals with integrated working and learning processes.

60 A main problem with the practical implementation of evaluation and quality assurance has always been how to measure the success of learning in the field of practical application, its impact on work performance, which is, to our understanding the real and test. Traditional methods focus on the achievement of learning objectives measured immediately after a certain period of instruction rather than on the long-term improvement of a business process. In addition, the impact of learning in the field of work has become more complex and difficult to measure with the increased autonomy and responsibility included in the performance of a certain operation. This impact is no longer restricted to the improvement of certain technical skills. The effects of learning in this context may extend to

- 70
- the improved use of technology and
 - the improved co-operation within a certain group or unit and as far as
 - the improved creative power of the company as a whole.

It is obvious that effects of this sort are difficult to measure at all and present an almost insuperable obstacle to external evaluation.

The learner is the best judge of his learning progress and how it affects his work

In view of the fact that the modern employee is entrusted with the responsibility for machinery and operations where millions may be at stake, he should be thought capable of judging the benefit of learning activities for his performance and the performance of his unit.

Like no other, the employee himself is in a position

- To take stock of his own abilities with regard to the requirements of his job
- To assess the effect his learning has on the improvement of his performance
- To trace the practical result back to the learning situation and its elements (content, materials, trainer) and
- To define remaining skills gaps and initiate new and possibly improved learning processes

By making the employee – perhaps not the sole, but the principal agent of evaluation it could be simpler as well as more to the point than external evaluation or quality assurance.

The principle can be extended to trainers who are in a firsthand position to perceive deficits in the teaching/learning process itself and should be able to feed this information back into the process.

To explore methods of introducing self-evaluation in the business world seems all the more important in a context of international flexibility and mobility of employees. A cross-cultural measurement and comparison of skills independent of different educational systems could be achieved by standardisation not of skills but of tools and methods for evaluation. This, however, is a matter for the future.

The question at this point is, why self-evaluation if there are so many advantages to it, has not been explored and implemented more often than in some isolated cases. The answer is fairly obvious.

Self-evaluation does not work without certain changes in the individual as well as in his work environment

Are employees really fair judges of their own abilities? Self-criticism and owning up to one's own deficiencies do not come easy to everybody, particularly when one's employment – really or supposedly – is at stake.

Most of us have learned that it is better to conceal our faults because we may be held responsible and punished for them, an experience we have had from our earliest schooldays. And in the world of employment more often than not a lack of skill jeopardises promotion rather than opening up the opportunity for learning.

The introduction of the principle of self-evaluation in a company therefore means that this mechanism of distrust and concealment has to be broken. If an employee is to own up to certain skills gaps, he has to be sure that he will not be held accountable for them but that they will be considered no more than the starting point for specific training. The same applies in general for teachers and facilitators.

Consequently, the individuals who are to perform self-evaluation will have to come to terms with an image of themselves that includes self-criticism as a positive element and starting point for continuous improvement. This psychological side of the task is perhaps hardest to achieve.

120 Secondly, the individuals will have to acquire certain (additional) educational skills if they are to assess their own learning behaviour and progress and the conditions favourable or unfavourable to them. These skills comprise identifying relevant sources of information and gaining access to them, working with different methods and media, knowing their own learning type and corresponding methods for learning, measuring learning progress, etc.

Management, on the other hand, will have to check and revise the traditional appraisal system existing in most companies, to reconcile it with self-appraisal and self-evaluation. This will be the first step towards a cultural change in the direction of a co-operative system of maintaining and developing human resources based on
130 mutual trust and fairness.

This may appear too much of a task to take on for single project, but it will not be a matter of starting from scratch. In most companies, instruments and procedures favourable to employee participation are already in place which can be built upon. And, for example, guidelines for appraisal interviews can be upgraded to create a mutual feedback instrument.

Conclusions, first steps of the project

In the companies co-operating in the project, we will first of all take stock of existing instruments for evaluation and self-evaluation. We will then develop standards for new or improved instruments. In accordance with the overall
140 objective of the project it will be a main consideration to involve the employees in any new developments from the start.

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